



War of Hashtags and Hackers: Who Won the Online Battle?

Mai Malkawi, Yanmin Yu, and Mohammed Al-Azdee
College of Public & International Affairs
University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT

Abstract:

After the latest Israel-Hamas War in 2014; there was another battle taking place between those who support the Hamas and Gaza, and those who support Israel. This research paper discusses that battle which took place in the cyber world on social media. The paper shows how strong was the impact of social media activists and Anonymous hackers who were involved in the psychological warfare side-by-side with the physical one against Israel. The Paper addresses this hypothesis with three main points: the effectiveness of the war of hashtags on both sides and who won this cyber battle, how social media worked as a medium to reveal information during this war, and finally, analyzing the increase in the activities of Anonymous Hacking and their subsequent impact on Israel.



Israeli bombs on Gaza in July 2014.

Key Questions:

The main Question/s which leads this research of the Israeli's operation in Gaza between July 8th and August 28, 2014 are :

- How successful was the "Online War" using trends Hashtags in social media?
- How were social media treated by the traditional Media, and how they were used to expose and reveal information that contradicts the reporting of of some Western and American media?
- Did the attacks of Anonymous Hackers represent any serious threat to Israel, and did they impact Israeli institutions and people?



Israeli people show fear from Hamas Rockets in July 2014

Main Arguments:

1. Gaza 2014: War of Hashtags:

The online battle started since the first war in Gaza in 2009, and continued during the 2012 Israeli operation. But it became much stronger in 2014. Pro-Hamas from all over the world used social media, like Facebook and Twitter, to share pictures and videos from Gaza. The most used hashtags were **#GazaUnderAttck** and **#prayforgaza**. They were used for more than 8 million times. While pro-Israeli used hashtags like **#Israelunderfire** and **#prayforisrael** for around 400 thousand times (Topsy.com, 2014).



An analysis of the trendy Hashtags in July & August 2014

2. Social Media Vs. Traditional media's coverage:

Social media during the 2014 war in Gaza worked as a medium to correct some of the reporting of traditional media. Social media exposed the mistakes of some Western and American media:

- **Ayman Mohyeldin**, an **NBC** news correspondent, was pulled out of Gaza after posting on Twitter about an Israeli strike that killed four Palestinian boys.
- **Diana Magnay**, **CNN** journalist in Tel Aviv was sent back home when she tweeted about how Israeli people were threatening her.

- **ABC** News made a mistake by mischaracterizing a picture of a Palestinian family dealing with the aftermath of an Israeli strike as an Israeli family, but corrected the error and apologized on air later.
- **BBC** was criticized for its war coverage. Both Israelis and Palestinians claimed that the coverage was loaded with bias.



NBC correspondent, Ayman Mohyeldin in Gaza 2014.

3. Attacks of Hackers against Israel

- Hackers launched attacks on Israel's Internet infrastructure during the war in Gaza in 2009. They also attacked governmental websites and around half a million of personal computers.
- During the war in Gaza in 2012, there were more than 44 million hacking attempts on Israeli governmental websites.
- In 2014 an Israeli official said the number of Hacking attacks on Israeli Institutions and Israeli people accounts had increased to 150 per day.

Conclusion & Results:

Despite the fact that cyber wars might not be as harmful as those in the real world, it seems that social media is evolving, day by day, as a battlefield, and internet users, who are mostly youth, have become more aware of it as a weapon. Therefore, the results of social media impacts in the 2014 war in Gaza were :

- Israel started losing the support of Western media when it lost the cyber war. The number of pro-Hamas hashtags on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube was more than the hasgtags that have been used by pro-Israel.
- Media coverage lost its biased focus when social media revealed problems in news coverage of the war.



Diana Magnay, CNN journalist in Tel-Aviv 2014. In the frame is her tweet about Israelis who she said threatened her.

- Attacks of hackers never stopped even when the actual conflict in the real world was on its way to end. Indicators reveal attacks on accounts and vital websites within the State of Israel.



Anonymous Hackers' Mask in a poster they use in their activities against Israeli.

References

- Burrell, Ian. "Israel-Gaza conflict: Social media becomes the latest battleground in Middle East aggression." The Independent. July 14th, 2014.
- Carr, David. "At Front Lines, Bearing Witness in Real Time. " New York Times . JULY 27, 2014.
- Doha Center for Media Freedom. "BBC under spotlight over Gaza coverage." Doha Center for Media Freedom. August 06, 2014.
- Estrin, Daniel. "A Hamas terror anthem is Israel's biggest summer hit." PRI. August 13, 2014.
- "Gaza and Israel: War of the Hashtags." Aljazeera. July 22, 2014. Accessed October 13, 2014.
- Maghrebi, Ahmad. "Hashtag War in Gaza. " Almonitor. December 1st, 2012.
- Margolin, Alex. "Top Five Media Fails of the Gaza War. Honest Reporting. " August 20th, 2014.
- Pfeffer, Anshel. Foreign press: Hamas didn't censor us in Gaza, they were nowhere to be found. Haaretz. August 08, 2014.
- Soluk, Kirk. DDoS and Geopolitics – Attack analysis in the context of the Israeli-Hamas conflict. The ARBOR Networks. August 05, 2014.
- Tharoor, Ishaan. "4 reasons Hamas has not lost the war in Gaza." Washington Post. August 06, 2014.
- Topsy.com. www.topsy.com 2014.